

Message from J.S. Paluch

Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time

License to Sin

In the James Bond movies, 007 has a license to kill. He can shoot all the bad guys he wants without worrying about being charged with murder. God, however, does not issue a license to sin. The first reading from Sirach reminds us that any time we choose between life and death, good and evil, it is our free choice and our responsibility. God may allow us to make bad choices, but God never commands anyone to sin.

Jesus goes even deeper than Sirach. The people of Sirach's time had followed the laws and commandments that governed external actions. As long as they treated others fairly, did not kill anyone or steal from them, they could think whatever they wanted. But Jesus taught that thoughts and desires that lead to sin can also be freely chosen or rejected. In the Gospel, he gives us some examples.

The first is about killing. Jesus says that anyone who gets angry enough to kill or who looks down on his neighbor as not deserving to live has committed murder in his heart. What prejudices or grudges am I holding in my heart? The longer I hold onto hurtful feelings, the more likely it becomes that they will lead to hurtful actions. Because the Eucharist is our sacrament of unity, we should take care to be reconciled with others before coming to the altar.

The next warning is about adultery, which also begins with interior feelings. Jesus exaggerates when he tells us to cut off a hand or tear out an eye, because he knew how easily we rationalize our feelings and pretend they are harmless. This leads to the next warning about divorce. Jesus takes marriage seriously and expects his disciples to do the same.

His final example concerns taking oaths. Apparently, people would swear upon almost anything in an effort to be believed. Jesus gets to the point and says that we wouldn't need oaths if we always told the truth and kept our promises. Our faith is based on the knowledge that God keeps promises. Shouldn't we do the same?

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